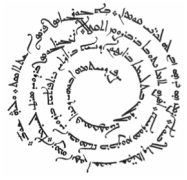
Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The Third Day



Texts from Christian Late Antiquity

47

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Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The Third Day

Edited and Translated by

Edward G. Mathews Jr.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Bedjan	P. Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis* (see Bibliography)
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
CBOTS	Coniectanea Biblica. Old Testament Series
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
FOTC	Fathers of the Church
OCA	*Orientalia Christiana Analecta*
OCP	*Orientalia Christiana Periodica*
OS	*L'Orient Syrien*
OtSt	*Oudtestamentische Studien*
PdO	*Parole de l'Orient*
PO	Patrologia Orientalis
S	*Sobornost*
SC	Sources Chrétiennes
TFCLA	Texts from Christian Late Antiquity

INTRODUCTION

INFORMATION ON THIS HOMILY
Homily Title: Homily on the Fashioning of Creation, The Third Day
Source of Text: *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, edited by Paul Bedjan (Paris-Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1907, 2nd ed. Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2006), vol. 3, pp. 43–60. [Homily 71c]
Lines: 338 [843–1180]

OUTLINE

The text translated here is now the third installment of the long *Mêmrâ on the Fashioning of Creation*, composed in the late fifth-early sixth century by Jacob of Sarug, and which essentially comprises his commentary on the *Hexaemeron*, or the six days of creation as found recorded in the first chapter of the canonical book of Genesis.[1] This section, which comprises lines 843–1180 of the original *mêmrâ*, provides the reader with Jacob's poetic meditation on the third day of creation as recorded in Genesis 1:9–13. On this day God does two things: first, He separates, or draws back, the waters from the earth (vv. 9–10), and then He brings forth all sorts of vegetation "each according to its kind" upon that newly revealed dry land (vv. 11–12).[2]

[1] The entire text was first published in P. Bedjan, *Homiliae Selectae Mar-Jacobi Sarugensis*, III.1–151. Days 1 and 2 were reprinted, with English translation, in Mathews, Jr., *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The First Day* and Mathews, Jr., *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The Second Day*.

[2] See summary in T. Jansma, "L'Hexaméron de Jacques de Sarug," 20–23.

As was already noted in the introduction to the section entitled *Homily on the Second Day*, Jacob may have known only one written source other than the bible, but he still was not writing within a vacuum; several of his contemporaries and near contemporaries recorded their thoughts on these first days as well. Jacob almost certainly read his predecessor Ephrem's *Commentary on Genesis*, as he seems well aware of his teaching here and throughout this long homily. With regard specifically to this third day, Jacob differs very little from what Ephrem said in his *Commentary on Genesis*. In fact, in contrast to these 338 lines that Jacob consecrates to the third day, Ephrem comments very little on the events of the third day, seemingly content simply to reiterate what is found in the biblical text.[3]

Jacob's contemporary and arch-antagonist Narsai also does little more than to recount the facts as recorded in the biblical account of the third day. In his first homily, a resume of the days of creation, he skips right over the third day. In the third homily, *On the Formation of Creation*, he writes only:

> [God] gathered the waters and turned the seas into a huge reservoir;
> His mighty signal united them and made them bring forth reptiles.
> The womb of those fluid waters brought forth dense bodies,
> and from heavy bodies [God] made the birds with their light wings.
> He gave command to the earth and it conceived and brought forth species and families:
> wild animals, domestic animals and every species.
> He tilled the earth and cast into it the seed of life;
> seeds sprouted, trees rose up and fruits blossomed.[4]

In a later homily from the same collection he writes:

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[3] Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, I.21–22. In his commentary on the second day Ephrem does, however, undertake a rather lengthy discussion concerning the question of the saltiness of the seas that were formed on the third day.

[4] *Homélies de Narsaï sur la création*, III.105–112.

> [God] said, "Let the waters be gathered and let them become seas in a single place,
> and let the surface of the earth be revealed that it may be suitable for habitation."
> O commandment that does not toil! O word that cannot be impeded![5]
> Just as His will commanded it, the waters gathered into seas.[6]

Further on in this same homily, he again adds:

> [God] gathered the water from the earth into reservoirs of seas and abysses,
> and He adorned it with grains and with trees for the life of man and of beast.[7]

Eusebius of Emesa, whose *Commentary on Genesis* was composed in Greek a century earlier but which survives only in Armenian translation, deals very cursorily on the events of day three, commenting only on the growth of that day.[8] Jacob's contemporary in the Greek world, Theodoret of Cyr, apparently thought that no commentary was necessary, as his questions pass over day three altogether.[9] In his short discussion, Eghishē is concerned primarily with the location and the precise nature of the seas.[10]

Only his predecessor, Basil of Caesarea, devoted any lengthy commentary on the third day; in fact, he devotes two of his nine homilies *On the Hexaemeron* specifically to the third day, one for each of the two 'events' of this day.[11] Although a Syriac translation of this work certainly existed by the time that Jacob composed his

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[5] Cf. Isaiah 55:11.

[6] *Homélies de Narsaï sur la création*, III.161–164.

[7] *Homélies de Narsaï sur la création*, III. 340–341.

[8] Eusebius of Emesa, *Commentary on Genesis*, 36–37; and see n. 38, below.

[9] *Theodoret of Cyrus, The Questions on the Octateuch. Volume 1: On Genesis and Exodus*.

[10] Eghishē, *Commentary on Genesis*, 24–27.

[11] *The Hexaemeron of Saint Basil*; Basil treats the gathering of the waters in Homily IV, and the growth of the various types of vegetation in Homily V.

Homily on the Fashioning of Creation, there is still no evidence that Jacob knew of it, even though one can find a few parallels, which are cited in the notes to the translation, below.

Jacob begins this portion of his homily with a second appeal to the reader to adopt the necessary spiritual state of mind and heart in order to understand properly what Moses is trying to convey by what he records of the events that occur on the third day. For "one understands by faith … that by [His] Word the Lord created [everything] from nothing". In this one line, Jacob sets out the two things he most insists on: "God created" – no one else –, and only by His power did all things come into existence and act according to their nature; and God created "ex nihilo" – from nothing. He has certainly emphasized these two things earlier in this homily, but he puts them forth again here with even greater assertiveness.

It is completely and exclusively by God's command that the waters gather together and then go to their appointed places, leaving the earth now visible and free to dry off in the air that it feels for the first time. These waters do not go to their places by any natural means or characteristics, not even by any geophysical inclines or channels, but only by the command of God. Once they have arrived in these places the waters are then bound by sand, but only at the command of God for the sand itself is far too insignificant and naturally ill-equipped to hold back the waters by itself. The world itself, on the witness of Job, is suspended in the middle of nothing again solely by the command of God, without whose power the earth would just fall into oblivion.

Once the dry land appeared God commanded that it produce vegetation of all sorts. Again Jacob emphasizes that is was only by the command of God that the vegetation was produced. God watched over this production like a wife and a mother with great love for the earth, both His "spouse" and His "child". And He commanded that all this vegetation appear ripe and fully mature on this same third day presumably, as his contemporaries argue, so that the animals as well as Adam and Eve who were soon to enter the world would have the necessary sustenance to maintain their own lives. As all vegetation produced "according to its own kind", both animals and humans would be able to know the beneficial characteristics of each type of plant.

Jacob concludes this portion of Homily 71 with a short review of the procession of these first three days and then points out that these first three days are to be distinguished from the three days to follow by reason of the fact that they alone were illuminated by that original unchanging light that was diffused over everything for those three days. On day four the sun and the moon were created and thereafter it was from these two orbs that the earth received its light.

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

While such words are in no way unique in Jacob's writings, a few terms clustered here in this third portion of his *Homily on the Hexaemeron* merit a brief comment, particularly ܒܪܝܬܘܬܐ and ܥܒܝܕܬܐ. These are common abstract nouns in Jacob and in early Syriac literature, conveying the meaning of either the process or the product of making or creating, respectively. Clear as this seems, the words can sometimes be quite difficult to translate, especially in a poetic text. In this homily I have had to resort here to several different circumlocutions in order to translate these abstract nouns and still maintain some sort of poetic rhythm to the translation. I have noted in each instance where one of these words (as well as a single instance of the word ܨܒܘܬܐ) occurs in an attempt to alert the reader to when Jacob uses them in his text.

SUMMARY

I. The Waters gather at the Command of God (843–890)

II. The Seas and the Waters all go to their Appointed Places (891–938)

III. The Seas are Permanently Bound by the Sand (939–990)

IV. God suspended the Earth on Nothing (991–1036)

V. God is Husband to the Earth, His Bride (1037–1078)

VI. The Earth brought forth every sort of Vegetation (1079–1114)

VII. All Vegetation Produces according to their Kind (1115–1150)

VIII. The First Three Days are now Completed (1151–1180)

TEXT AND TRANSLATION

HOMILY 71C: ON THE FASHIONING OF CREATION: THE THIRD DAY

I. THE WATERS GATHER AT THE COMMAND OF GOD

There is an urgent need here, my brothers, for spiritual thoughts
and for a mind that is full of truth and faith,
and for one's understanding to hasten to the reading
while the soul takes its delight in the love of the Godhead.[1]
One understands by faith, if he is discerning,[2]
that by [His] Word the Lord created the worlds[3] from nothing.[4]
In his book[5] Moses, that font of prophecy,[6] set out

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[1] Or, "Divinity" as it was translated in *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The First Day*.

[2] Jacob here echoes some of his long plea for an attitude necessary for proper understanding of the biblical account, as found in *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The First Day*, 41–56.

[3] Some texts read here the singular, but Bedjan maintains, following his base manuscript, the plural reading. Both readings are certainly defensible as Jacob, here (see l. 898, below) and in his other works, uses both. I have opted for the plural reading here as I understand Jacob, in what seems to me to be an opening summary statement, to be referring to both the invisible (which he sometimes refers to as the 'other world'; Syr., ܥܠܡܐ ܕܠܥܠ ܡܢ) and the visible worlds; see the brief discussion in T. Bou Mansour, *La théologie de Jacques de Saroug*, I. 4–7.

[4] Cf. John 1:3. Jacob insists in all his relevant works, but especially here in this homily, on *creatio ex nihilo*; see *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The First Day*, 65–84, 109–110, 131–173, et al.; see also *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The Second Day*, 535–546, and note 3, there.

[5] This word book (Syr., ܣܦܪܐ) here is singular so it presumably refers here only to the book of Genesis, and not to the entire Pentateuch, of which Moses is the traditional author, though it is also possible to read it as a collective term comprising all five books.

[6] Earlier in this *mêmrâ*, l. 57, Jacob calls Moses the "scribe of truth; see *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The First Day*, 12, 137, 255.

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all these incomprehensible treasures, riches and wealth.
His soul was so illumined with prophecies and with revelations
that he was able to see the Lord face to face,[7]
that he was able to learn the entire course of all creation,
how the world came forth out of nothing.
Moses heard those words that [God] uttered when He made it,[8]
and, with great wonder, [Moses] revealed to the world its Creator.
Just as all creation exists because of [God's] hidden signal,[9]
so too does all that has been made run its course by [His] great power.
"God said, 'Let the waters be gathered' into seas,
'and let the earth appear'", for it had been hidden by the flood-waters. Gen 1:9
Immediately and without delay the waters set off for the seas,
with rapid haste to the appointed spot to which they were sent.
The command went forth over the flood-waters and pushed them back,
and like legions they left that place and transformed the earth.
The great mass of water that had been standing there departed
and looked to go to a hollowed out place where it was sent.
The sound of the command roused them and drove them forth
just as that sound of armor drove forth the Edomites.[10]
Speedily the [waters] gathered themselves, wave upon wave,

[7] Cf. Exodus 33:11, Deuteronomy 34:10.

[8] Syr., ܚܕܘܗܝ; see introduction, p. 5, above.

[9] As often noted in previous fascicles in this series, this signal is an essential element in the early Syrian understanding of how God created the earth, especially for Jacob; see K. Alwan, "Le 'remzo' selon la pensée de Jacques de Saroug."

[10] Cf. 1 Maccabees 6:28–47.

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and a great surge propelled them to relocate.
It is not because the place of the seas sloped down that they hurried there,
but rather because of that command of the Godhead.
The sea was deep but it was not for that reason that they gathered there;
rather, it was because the Lord had commanded it that they collected there.
[God] said, "Let the waters be gathered" and the waters obeyed, Gen 1:9
and in order to fulfill that command, "they were gathered".
Whether the place to which He commanded them was deep or high,
they hastened to fulfill the voice of His command.
It was not that it was deep nor that it sloped that they hurried to that place;
rather, it was because that command made them hasten there.
If it were that the waters descended into it because of the depth of the sea
then those [waters] above would not have remained in that high place.
For when [God] commands He even makes water rise up into the clouds,
and because He so commanded it they hastened as if into a deep place.[11]

[11] Jacob places much greater importance on the power of God's command than does Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* I.12, who is more occupied with establishing the origin of the saltiness of the water in the seas. Although it is unlikely that Jacob knew of it, Basil, *Hexaemeron*, IV.2, also argues the importance of God's command over any natural characteristics of the water. Compare also the longer, more comprehensive description in *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The Second Day*, 559–604.

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He calls out to the waters of the sea and they hear the voice of His command,
and just as He wills He pours them down as it is written.[12]
And so, [God] commanded that they be gathered there on the third day,
and just as He commanded, they were gathered on that third day. Gen 1:9
He released that gathering that had been gathered upon the earth,
and brought it to the ends of [the earth] and so revealed its surface.

II. THE SEAS AND THE WATERS ALL GO TO THEIR APPOINTED PLACES

Who then has a soul that is above all evil?
Or a mind that burns with the fire of the love for the Godhead?
Or a heart that is devoid of carnal thoughts?
Or an intellect that is pure and full of wonder at what has been made?[13]
Let us go and stand on that place in Sinai at the side of Moses,
and let us hear from him the words and phrases of his prophecy.
Let us see there those wondrous things of creation,[14]
when the palace of the world[15] was being built by that hidden power.
The signal of the Godhead goes out over all things,

[12] Cf. Genesis 7:4, Amos 9:6, Matthew 5:45 and parallels.

[13] Syr., ܚܟܡܬܐ; see introduction, p. 5, above.

[14] Syr., ܣܝܡܐ; see introduction, p. 5, above.

[15] While Bedjan reads the plural, I have opted here to read the singular as it seems more likely that Jacob is confining himself here to the palace of "this world" being prepared for the king [i.e., Adam] soon to come; see also note 3, above.

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measuring the days, balancing the times, ordering and establishing:
evening in its place, night in its spot and the dawn on its path,
and to the day It[16] gives its measure and takes Its delight in it.
It weaves and clothes the light and the darkness in colors,
in order to distinguish[17] the night from the day by their garments.
It sets up camp and pitches a great tent over every corner
that in its shadow all creation might dwell in a habitable place.
It yokes nights and days together and makes them proceed
one after the other to form a cycle that is full of wonder.
It divides up the deep and sends it to various places;
the waters hear Its voice and hasten to their boundaries.
It confines the seas above in that vault[18] of the firmament,
and they rest there calmly as if in a deep crater in a high place.
It commands the lower [seas] and they are gathered within the world;
however It wills, It establishes gathering points for the flood-waters.
The Lord commanded the waters on that third day
to be gathered in that place where He willed to make them dwell.
"Let the waters below be gathered," it was said, Gen 1:9
and they heard Him when He summoned them to gather together.
Because there were other waters in a high place above,

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[16] I have capitalized the pronoun It here and in what follows when its antecedent is the 'signal' of God, in order to try to maintain the distinction – and some clarity for the reader who has little or no knowledge of Syriac – between the pronominal subject and the pronominal object of the action of 'the signal', both of which would otherwise have to be rendered into English as lower-case 'it'.

[17] This translation of the Syriac ܕܢܦܠܓ is, I believe, the better one according to Jacob's normal usage, but a plausible and grammatically defensible alternative might is "so that we might distinguish …"; Jacob, however, rarely introduces such a gratuitous instance of an authorial first person plural.

[18] Syr., ܩܒܐ; see Jacob, *Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The Second Day*, 669; see also the introduction to that volume, pp. 2–3, for the various terms that Jacob employed for the firmament in the portion of this homily to do with the creation of the firmament on the second day.

ܫܡܥܘܢ ܒܪ ܩܠܘܦܐ ܫܠܝܚܐ ܘܫܠܝܚ ܝܫܘܥ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܀ 900
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He made known that He willed to gather those waters as well.
To those waters below the firmament the command went forth,
and those [waters] gathered together just as they were commanded.
Those upper waters were confined on the second day
in a place above, and there they remained just as they were commanded.[19]
He commanded the lower waters on that third day
and they gathered into seas just as He commanded them.
These waters heard the voice of the Maker's[20] command,
and they latched on to a course to go to that appointed place.
They leap up and over every chasm and every abyss
in order to reach that place designated by God.
Their course was a speedy one for it was the command of the Godhead,
and if any deep place opposed the waters they would not remain there.
Nor would any high place impede them from hastening onwards,
nor would any low place hinder them from their journey.
They would rush on, passing by both high places and low places,
for the voice of the command presses them to move on in haste.
God said, "Let them be gathered," and they were gathered, Gen 1:9
and to the waters both height and depth were level as they proceeded.

[19] Cf. Jacob, *Homily on the Six Days of Creation: The Second Day*, 549–604, especially 556–568.

[20] Syr., ܡܠܐ; see introduction, p. 5, above.

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III. THE SEAS ARE PERMANENTLY BOUND BY THE SAND

The waters came and there was a gathering in a great place,
and to that gathering God gave the name 'seas'.[21]
The waters of the seas went up and were contained in a reservoir,
and the power that made [everything][22] confined them there.
It made gates and bolts for the sea, made it enter and enclosed it,
It set there fine sand[23] as a border and the [sea] did not pass beyond it.
It divided them and granted places for the both of them,
the seas and the dry land, so that each might keep to its own place.
The raging waves of the sea were raised up like heaps,
but the sand was spread there and they were restrained and did not flow over.
The sea was thus harnessed like a wild horse,
by the reins of sand they were stilled and stand as if subdued.
God, the Almighty One,[24] by means of a small thing, manifested His power,
to make the world perceive just how awesome is His command:[25]
He set the sand that was spread there as a fence for a great sea,
and it overcomes[26] all those waves that are bound by it.[27]

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[21] Cf. Genesis 1:10.

[22] Syr., ܟܠܡܗ; see introduction, p. 5, above.

[23] See note 28, below.

[24] Literally, "The warrior (or, champion) of the world/s"; on the 'world' or 'worlds', see note 3, above.

[25] Syr., ܦܩܕܡܗ; see introduction, p. 5, above.

[26] Other witnesses read "encloses"; cf. Bedjan III.49, n. 2.

[27] Cf. Jeremiah 5:22.

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For sand is incapable of standing against the seas
unless the signal of the Godhead were to forbid them.
By something so minute[28] He sets down a law and all the seas
that fight against it with their storms cannot break it.
For sand is porous while the command of the Godhead is solid;
and by [His] command the sand stands fast and does not decompose.
The gatherings of the seas do not overflow it for they are confined by it,
and the flood-waters cannot dissolve it for they are bound by it.
The sea is an obedient servant that holds to its place;
it stands within its bounds and remains as its Lord commands.
Whether in storms or in tempests that toss it about,
it does not assail the boundary to cross into a place where it does not belong.
It is kept in check by a single yoke along the dry land and does not wear it away,
but moves along with it and does not press on it to take over its place.
Between the sea and the dry land the Creator placed peace,
so that as long as the world existed there would be peace on their borders.
That Maker who had separated those places[29]
has now united them that they might view each other as equals.
He showed the sea its place and its location; He brought it there and set it down,
and as if by a high wall, He enclosed it by that expanse of sand.

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[28] Syr., ܫܝܫܐ; Basil, *Hexaemeron* IV.3, makes a similar point, calling the sand, which performs such a gigantic task "the weakest/most insignificant of all things (Greek, τῷ ἀσθενεστάτῳ πάντων); the Syriac translation modifies this only slightly: ܡܕܡ ܚܕ, which Thomson translates as "a little object". Jacob's near contemporary, the Armenian Vardapet Eghishē, also marvels the great seas are completely hindered from overflowing their banks by the չինչ աւազ, which Papazian translates as "the tiny sand" but which really means something more like "the insignificant sand," or even more literally, "the sand which is essentially nothing [չ - ինչ]"; see Eghishē, *Commentary on Genesis*, 26–27.

[29] Cf. Genesis 1:9.

لَا يَدُوا وِسْلَا هْمِعْسَ هْمِنْتَ كَدِمْكَلَا عْمِشْدَا: 955
أَلَا وْمِدُوْ وْلِكْدَوْلَا وِلَمْمِ أَنَى؛
هَجِيْسِسُا هُمِ نُشْدَهُدَا وَلَا هُنْيِ كْدَ:
قَكْدَوْ عْمِشْدَا وِهُنْيِ كْشْدَه حْشْسَقَةْكِسْدَوْ؛
وْقَا كِمِ سْلَا وَسْسِ قْدَمِبُوْ وْلِكْدَوْلَا:
هَحْشْدَمِبُوْا هُلَمِ سْلَا وَلَا هْكِلَوْقَا؛ 960
وَلَا حْنَيِ كْدَ هْتَعْدَا وِعْمِشْدَا وْسْمْشَمِ هْدَ:
وَلَا هُنْيِ كْدَ قْكَلَا هُشْقَةْلَا وْهْصَنَيِ هْدَ؛
عْشَدَا كْجِبُوْا هْمِكْلَهْحِنُوْا وْكْحَبِ أَلَاوْهَ:
وَهُمِ كْكِلَهْشَهْدَه هَلَمِ وْهْشَبِ كْدَ هُنْيِ هَشَّمِ؛
هَحْصَشْقَةْدَا هَحْشْسَقَةْلَا وِهْكِلَلَاسْنَيِ هْدَ: 965
لَا لِيْزَا لَهْشَهُدَا وِنْحَدَ لَّلَاوْزَا وِكْدَ وَسْدَه وْهِ؛
هَحْسَبِ نْسِزَا حْبَيِ كْمِ عْدَهُدَا وَلَا هُشْمِ كْدَ:
وَهُزَدَ كْشْدَه وَلَا وْوْدَ كْدَ وِوْهْصِكَه نْكْشْمِ؛
كْسِكِ عْشَدَا كْعْدَهُدَا هْسِزَا هُمِ كُوْهِزَا: 50
هَهُدَا وِهُلَمِ كْدَهُدَا هْسِزَا وْهِ كْكِلَهْشَقَةْشَهْوَ؛ 970
هُهِ كْشَهِوُا وِقْكِيْ كْشَهِ أَلَاوْوُلَا:
قْكِيْ أَنَى وْحَقَهْشَلَا سِوْوَا نْسَوْ؛
هْشَّمِ كْعْدَهُدَا أَلَاوْهَ وِوْهْصِكَه وَلَاكْلَا هُشْمِه:
وَلَا وْحَقَهْوُا وْشَدَا حْسُلَا كْبِزَا هْحْشَه؛

Just as if it were within gates with its bolts secured,
it is within the sand, barred by its presence and enclosed there.
With the beauty of its waves it rises up and gains force,
but because the gate is closed before it, it is unable to go out.
The Lord said, "Stay here," and so it did,
just as the Lord, who set the sea in its place, had commanded. Gen 1:9
Just as the time for night and for day had been separated,
so too did the sea and the dry land remain within their boundaries.
It was a great gathering that lay on the surface of the earth;
the seas ebbed and flowed in the place where it had been gathered.
The sea and the dry land became twin brothers on that one day;
they each took hold of their proper places, locations and borders.
On that day they received the designation of their names;
each one of them acquired its name and took possession of its place.
On that day "God called the dry land earth,
and that great[30] gathering of water He called "seas". Gen 1:10

IV. GOD SUSPENDED THE EARTH ON NOTHING

[God] saw that the structure that He had made[31] was good,[32]
and that the merciful act of what He had created[33] was full of wonder.
The earth that was fashioned upon nothing was beautiful,
just as it is written, "[God] suspended the earth upon nothing." Job 26:7

[30] Presumably, Jacob adds "great" into the Genesis citation here for the meter, but it is not impossible that he had a text in front of him with this word in it, although no such reading has survived.

[31] Syr., ܒܢܝܢܐ; see introduction, p. 5, above.

[32] Cf. Genesis 1:10.

[33] Syr., ܛܝܒܘܬܐ; see introduction, p. 5, above.

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ⵙⵉⵏ ⵙⵉⵏ ⵜⵉⵎⵓⵔⵜ ⵜⵉⵎⵓⵔⵜ ⵏ ⵜ

The seas that He enclosed within their boundaries were beautiful;
they were bound as if with shackles and immobile in their power.
The earth was hanging, but if the signal were to release it, it would fall;
and the seas were gathered but if It[34] released them they would destroy the earth.
Its power bore up the sea and the dry land, and watched over them both,
as if according to Its will they had been placed on something large.
For beneath the earth and beneath the waters beneath the earth
there was nothing except the power of the Godhead.
That power bore up creation like a mighty warrior
for there was no place for it to dwell or for It to place it.
Everything that It created was set in the middle of nothing,
and It bore it up, but if It were to let it go, it would no longer exist.
Therefore, It guided it to place it. Although It did indeed place it,
It did not place it where there was [already] something on which to place it.
If It were to let it go, it would fall forever;
It would occupy no space and would be utterly destroyed.
It would not release it, for no mother would release her child,
but It bore it up and watched over it because It had given it birth.
It created [all] creation and like a beloved child
It bears it up, and Its hidden power stands firm.

[34] I.e., God's "signal"; cf. n. 9, above.

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It is not bored, for a mother cannot be bored of her son,
for a mother's compassion is bound to her love for her offspring.
The Godhead is a compassionate mother;
in Its[35] great love it bears up the world like a child.
That Grace that built this world bears it up,
and as if on a great something It hangs it and watches over it.
Just as it is written, "[God] suspended the earth upon nothing," Job 26:7
and it was revealed that it is Grace that bears it up.
It fashioned the earth, gathered the seas and set down names
for the various created things throughout these days just as It willed.
The dry land appeared, and it was a marvelous thing that on one day
the earth, which was wet, dried up and was set between the flood-waters.
The Creator gave a command to that ministering wind[36]
and it dried up the surface of the earth that had been so wet.
For if the entire earth had not dried up
it could not have been called "dry land" as it was called.
It was dried up just as it is written: "the dry land
He called earth, and that gathering of waters seas." Gen 1:10
He dried, fashioned, arranged, finished, and made the earth;
and immediately commanded it to "be fruitful and produce" every sort of tree. Gen 1:11

[35] The antecedent is now the "Godhead" and not the "signal"; it quickly changes again to "Grace" in the next stanza.

[36] Cf. Gen 1:2, and see both *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The First Day*, 437–440, and note ad loc., and *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The Second Day*, 553–554.

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The voice of the command was its husband, and it began to produce new growth
from within its womb according to the command of the Lord, its master.

V. GOD IS HUSBAND TO THE EARTH, HIS BRIDE

God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation and plants,
and every fruit tree and seeds according to their kind." Gen 1:11
The power that made all this[37] wed the earth, Its bride
that It might begin to become a mother to the world that It bears.
That command filled the earth, a place of seed,
and that new womb began to give birth with great power.
It put forth blossoms and with its growth it ripened and was filled
with grasses and seeds; in one day they reached the harvest stage.
Trees sprouted up with their branches and their leaves,
their flowers along with their fruits, all fully ripened.
With their growth they sprouted up tall and long;
it was the perfection of all creation that had been made.
Just as Adam was neither an infant nor a child,
nor even a youth then a grown man, having grown in stages.
Rather, he was immediately a man when he came into being,
and in the same way all things came into existence at full growth.[38]
A tree rose up from the midst of the dust and bore fruit,
needing only a gatherer to come in and enjoy it.

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[37] Syr., ܗܘ ܕܥܒܕ; see introduction, p. 5, above.

[38] Jacob here clearly follows Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis* I.21, 25, who further recounts that the animals, as well as Adam and Eve, thus had nourishment available to them when they were created days later. Eusebius of Emesa concurs on the observation that, on the analogy of the animals, the vegetation must also have been created full-grown; see *Eusèbe, Commentaire de la Genese*, 36–37. This interpretation survives in the Syrian commentary tradition as least as late as Ishôdad of Merw; see *Commentaire d'Išo'dad de Merv sur l'ancien testament I. Genèse*, 33–34 (text), 35–36 (trans.). As with many early Syriac biblical interpretations, this one too has roots in Jewish interpretation; see L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* I.59, V.107.

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It put forth seed and with its growth it manifested spikes [of grain]
that waxed fat and became beautiful in their various forms.
The Maker commanded the womb of the earth and made it wholly fruitful:
seeds along with all types of trees and all types of fruits.
Every flower, every blossom, every herb,
and roses, buds of various hues in their various forms.
A stole of colors and of blossoms for the bride – the earth –
was unfolded and the mountains were filled with its various hues.
As soon as the bride entered into the world He commanded her to give birth,
the command was her husband so she immediately conceived and gave birth.
The hidden power instantly became her partner,
she obeyed, she conceived, she knelt down and quickly gave birth.
It was on that very day that she was given the name "earth";
on it she gave birth so that her children might also be named.
On that very day It uncovered her surface from the flood-waters,
on it all the wetness was cleared away from her.
In the place of the seas that were gathered upon her the dry land rose up,
and the Lord called it "earth" by the name that was designated for it.
"He commanded and it came into being,"[39] it was fashioned and set up for dwelling;
she conceived and gave birth to all the trees along with all their seeds.

[39] Psalm 148:5.

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In the month of Nisan the Lord made a wedding feast for the earth,
He introduced her to the world and her children multiplied that He might establish the world.
A year began though it had not been seeded but it was full of good things;
the first Nisan is the head of the world and is full of beauties.[40]

VI. THE EARTH BROUGHT FORTH EVERY SORT OF VEGETATION

The Maker is skillful and all that He makes is full of wonder;
for the sake of all [He made] may [your] mouth be stirred to give Him praise.
The firmament is completed and today the earth has been finished;
His provided cover for the house and then proceeded to construct the house.
The previous day He had set a ceiling[41] in the heights,
on the following day He fashioned the earth, a great house.
From the earth He brought forth and arranged all delights
in the midst of the house that all who eat them might enjoy them.
Like a wedding present He offered it to the earth that just came to be,
when He said, "Let the earth bring forth every kind of tree." Gen 1:11
He spoke a word and the riches of a sterile [earth] multiplied,

[40] Ephrem, *Commentary on Genesis*, I.8, states simply that "For Nisan was the first month; in it the number of the hours of day and night were equal."

41 Syr., ܐܝܟܠܐ; see Jacob, *Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The Second Day*, 667, 794; see also n. 18, above.

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and immediately it brought forth and produced treasures as He commanded it.
The handmaid was enriched by the gift that her husband had given her,
and at His command she put on a glory[42] with which she had not been clothed.
Both mountains and valleys were filled with every sort of flower,
and both heights and depths with diverse seeds of every variety:
all sorts of trees with their fruits along every boundary,
wines and oils, beautiful cypresses and tall cedars.
The mountains sprang up, rose up and provided cover, and the earth flourished;
she readied itself to produce for she was opulent and full of beauty.
In [the earth] this third day dawned and on it she came to fruition;
she rejoiced on [this day] and her womb was filled with every treasure.
On the third day that entered her the earth became firm,
and the great deep that was drowning her fled from her.
The children of her who had been desolate and inundated multiplied,
and her surface shone forth and she revealed it that she might see the light.
She clothed herself in various luminous and glorious types of trees,
with every seed and with every sort of shoot.
Her womb was sufficient and her Husband filled it with every good thing:
every treasury and every sort of wealth for future generations,
every shoot that is produced from trees,

[42] In the commentary literature, this putting on of glory is usually introduced in the case of Adam and Eve who lost their "garment of glory" by the fall but will recover it at the resurrection; Jacob here applies it to all creation. The classic article on this topic remains S. Brock, "Clothing metaphors as a means of theological expression in Syriac tradition".

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and for their kinds the seeds were preserved by their grains.
And lo, every sort of delicacy was produced
by that first command of her Husband[43] to the earth.
She received it from Him and her children multiplied along every coast,
and every day she produces from the gift that was so abundant in her.

VII. ALL VEGETATION PRODUCES ACCORDING TO THEIR KIND

The Maker commanded that the earth bring forth and the earth listened,
and from that time she brings forth and produces as He commanded her.
That Command-er stands over her like a guarantor,
that she might constantly produce good things for the world that He made dwell in her.
Her womb is fertile and her bosom is full and produces plenty,
in each and every generation as it was commanded.
The Maker laid up provisions in the ground and kept them there
for the nations and tribes of the world that He had fashioned.
He commanded the trees that when their sprouts are cut off
and set into the earth they will become fruitful according to their kind.
He granted the vine that when a shoot is taken from it
and buried in the dirt it too will become a vine.
He said to the seed that if they take it from one place
and sow it in another place it will come up two-fold.
He commanded the olive tree that when they take from its root

[43] For the Creator as Husband, see Isaiah 54:5.

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and they bury it in the ground a tree will grow just like the first one.
This one restriction He set down for trees and for grains,
that they would be generated only from their own kind in their proper times.
In their wombs they would keep seeds as well as seedlings
just as they were constituted by that Maker who constituted them.
He granted trees all sorts of different tastes,
glorious fruits of every type just as He willed.
To the olive tree oil and to the apple tree sweet smells,
and He set in the vine a joy of heart for all who are weary.
He provided oil to brighten a face with its rich substance,
and He made wine to give joy to the heart of all who drink it.[44]
In bread fullness and in fruit every sweetness,
and from the ground came every one of these many things.
With various tastes and smells of every sort,
may it increase glory for the Maker and delight for us.
He provided the earth with that blessed third day;
He completed and crowned her with riches, and good things He multiplied in her.
She stripped and removed that tunic of water in which she had been clothed,
and she clothed herself in a garment of blossoms, fruits and of flowers.
It was like an awakening for the earth on that third day,
the blessed day on which the earth was established and came to be.

[44] Again, it is unlikely to be a source, but Basil, *Hexaemeron* V.6 makes a similar point. In this case, it is more likely that both commentators have Psalm 104:15 in mind.

58 ܘܢܗܘ ܒܪܟ ܡܢ ܐܠܗܐ ܐܒܝ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܘܡܠܟܐ 1130
ܕܐܝܬ ܠܗ ܫܘܠܛܢܐ ܥܡ ܟܠ ܫܒܛܝ ܕܐܪܥܐ:
ܘܫܒܩ ܠܥܡܐ ܕܐܬܝ ܥܡ ܟܠ ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܘܫܘܠܛܢܐ ܕܝܠܗ
ܕܠܥܠܡ ܘܠܥܠܡܝ ܥܠܡܝܢ ܐܡܝܢ:
ܐܒܝ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܫܠܡ ܐܢܬ
ܘܒܫܢܬ ܫܬ ܡܐܐ ܘܬܫܥ ܐܠܦ ܫܢܝ ܒܥܠܡܐ: 1135
ܟܕ ܟܠ ܫܒܛܝ ܐܪܥܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܫܠܡ ܐܬܝ
ܐܦ ܒܝܘܡܝܗܘܢ ܕܐܠܗܐ ܐܒܝ ܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܫܠܡ ܐܬܝ
ܘܫܠܡ ܠܗ ܡܠܟܘܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܢܗܘܐ ܠܗ ܣܘܦ ܘܫܘܠܛܢܗ
ܕܠܐ ܢܫܬܒܩ ܠܐܚܪܢ ܐܠܐ ܠܗ ܘܠܡܠܟܘܬܗ ܢܥܒܕ ܘܢܬܩܝܡ
ܘܢܗܘ ܟܠ ܕܫܡܥ ܘܥܒܕ ܨܒܝܢܘܬܐ ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܕܫܠܡ 1140
ܕܠܐ ܢܥܒܕ ܨܒܝܢܘܬܗ ܘܠܐ ܢܥܒܕ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܐܚܪܢ ܐܠܐ ܠܗ ܒܠܚܘܕ
ܘܠܐ ܢܣܓܕ ܠܨܠܡ ܕܕܗܒ ܐܘ ܟܣܦ ܐܘ ܐܒܢ ܕܝܩܪ ܐܘ ܨܝܪ
ܕܥܒܕܝ ܐܢܫ ܒܐܘܡܢܘܬܐ ܕܡܚܫܒܬܐ ܘܒܨܢܥܬ ܐܝܕܝܗ
ܗܢܘ ܢܣܒ ܒܪܟܬܐ ܡܢ ܡܪܝܐ ܘܨܕܩܬܐ ܡܢ ܐܠܗܐ ܦܘܪܩܢܗ 1145
ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܗܢܐ ܗܘ ܕܢܣܒ ܐܢܫ ܐܠܗܐ ܘܐܢܫ ܐܒܝ ܝܥܩܘܒ
ܘܐܢ ܐܢܫ ܒܝܬ ܐܒܗܬ ܐܠܗܐ ܐܢܫ ܒܝܬ ܐܒܗܬ ܐܠܗܐ ܐܚܪܢ
ܐܠܐ

VIII. THE FIRST THREE DAYS ARE NOW COMPLETED

"The Lord saw that" every work of His hands "was beautiful;
and there was evening and there was morning" on "the third day". Gen 1:12–13
Three measures of the [weekly] cycle had now been assigned,
and its movement had begun that the days might pass by, one after another.
That first day was superceded, it then went forth and disappeared;
it also made that second day pass away like it was nothing.
Then that third day came but it too did not remain,
for it also departed and the place where it had been is unknown.[45]
These three days entered into the world and then went out from it,
but the other days did not enter the world like them.
These days were not like those days that followed them,
for they alone had that light which had no progression.
There was in them neither sun nor moon,
nor hours that could be counted by their limits;
no dawn, no evening, no midday – it was all the same:
a comely color that neither moves forward nor turns back.
There was no light hidden in moving spheres
nor did any solar hours progress in any orderly fashion.
These were days that a hidden power separated

[45] Compare the longer description of the progression of all six days in this first week in *Jacob of Sarug's Homilies on the Six Days of Creation: The First Day*, 384–423.

ﻭﻣﺎ ﺩﺍﻡ ﻓﻲ ﻫﺬﻩ ﺍﻟﺤﺎﻝ ﻓﻠﻴﺲ ﻟﻪ ﺃﻥ ﻳﺘﺼﺮﻑ ﺇﻻ ﺑﺈﺫﻥ ﺳﻴﺪﻩ ﻭﻣﻮﻻﻩ ﻭﻟﻴﺲ ﻟﻪ ﺃﻥ ﻳﺘﺰﻭﺝ ﺇﻻ ﺑﺈﺫﻧﻪ ﻭﻟﻴﺲ ﻟﻪ ﺃﻥ ﻳﺸﺘﺮﻱ ﻭﻻ ﻳﺒﻴﻊ ﻭﻻ ﻳﺘﺼﺮﻑ ﺇﻻ ﺑﺈﺫﻧﻪ ﻭﻟﻴﺲ ﻟﻪ ﺃﻥ ﻳﺘﺰﻭﺝ

by measures, to preserve a place for [the days] that followed.
Light was diffused for three days over all creation,
there was no shade upon the mountains or the high places.
No light dawned from one side in that place
that would go over to another side that there might be shade.
The light was diffused on all sides upon everything,
it stood, it was stationary and it did not travel along any path.
And so that light that was remained for three days;
it was not concealed in those vessels that came afterwards.
Rather, it was spread out, unbound and diffused over all creation,
according to the command of the Lord of all treasures who made it.[46]

[46] Syr., ܚܕ̈ܘܬܐ; see introduction, p. 5, above.

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ⵙⵍⵍⴰ ⵟⵎⵎⴰ ⴱⵜⵜⴰⵏ ⵖⵉⵍⵍⵉ ⵜⵜⵓⵔⵓⵣⵖ ⵏ ⵖⵓⵔⵉ ⵜⵜⵓⵔⵓⵣⵖ ⵏ ⵜⵜⵓⵔⵓⵣⵖ ⵏ ⵜⵜⵓⵔⵓⵣⵖ ⵏ

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